Ja 12 — Nigrodhamiga Jātaka

English translation by Robert Chalmers.

Source: https://raw.githubusercontent.com/suttacentral/sc-data/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b/html_text/en/pli/sutta/kn/ja/vol1/ja12.html

Source revision: 2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

License: Public Domain (original English edition, published 1895–1907)

Edited by E. B. Cowell

Original edition: Cambridge University Press, volume 1, 1895

Pinned source revision: https://github.com/suttacentral/sc-data/commit/2d9ca8da858f94302ed6783e2717bf73d651881b

Scope: Complete numbered source article from the traditional Jātaka commentary; canonical verses appear in story context. This is not a verse-only edition.

Changes: Converted the pinned SuttaCentral HTML article to plain text; removed inline print page-reference labels and normalized whitespace. The original source retains references.

Text

“Keep only with the Banyan Deer.”—This story was told by the Master while at Jetavana about the mother of the Elder named Prince Kassapa. The daughter, we learn, of a wealthy merchant of Rajagaha was deeply rooted in goodness and scorned all temporal things; she had reached her final existence, and within her breast, like a lamp in a pitcher, glowed her sure hope of winning Arahatship. As soon as she reached knowledge of herself, she took no joy in a worldly life but yearned to renounce the world. With this aim, she said to her mother and father, “My dear parents, my heart takes no joy in a worldly life; fain would I embrace the saving doctrine of the Buddha. Suffer me to take the vows.”

“What, my dear? Ours is a very wealthy family, and you are our only daughter. You cannot take the vows.”

Having failed to win her parents’ consent, though she asked them again and again, she thought to herself, “Be it so then; when I am married into another family, I will gain my husband’s consent and take the vows.” And when, being grown up, she entered another family, she proved a devoted wife and lived a life of goodness and virtue in her new home. Now it came to pass that she conceived, though she knew it not.

There was a festival proclaimed in that city, and everybody kept holiday, the city being decked like a city of the gods. But she, even at the height of the festival, neither anointed herself nor put on any finery, going about in her every-day attire. So her husband said to her, “My dear wife, everybody is holiday-making; but you do not put on your bravery.”

“My lord and master,” she replied, “the body is filled with two-and-thirty component parts. Wherefore should it be adorned? This bodily frame is not of angelic or archangelic mould; it is not made of gold, jewels, or yellow sandal-wood; it takes not its birth from the womb of lotus-flowers, white or red or blue; it is not filled with any immortal balsam. Nay, it is bred of corruption, and born of mortal parents; the qualities that mark it are the wearing

and wasting away, the decay and destruction of the merely transient; it is fated to swell a graveyard, and is devoted to lusts; it is the source of sorrow, and the occasion of lamentation; it is the abode of all diseases, and the repository of the workings of Karma. Foul within,—it is always excreting. Yea, as all the world can see, its end is death, passing to the charnel-house, there to be the dwelling-place of worms . What should I achieve, my bridegroom, by tricking out this body? Would not its adornment be like decorating the outside of a close-stool?"

"My dear wife," rejoined the young merchant, "if you regard this body as so sinful, why don't you become a Sister?"

"If I am accepted, my husband, I will take the vows this very day." "Very good," said he, "I will get you admitted to the Order." And after he had shewn lavish bounty and hospitality to the Order, he escorted her with a large following to the nunnery and had her admitted a Sister,—but of the following of Devadatta. Great was her joy at the fulfilment of her desire to become a Sister.

As her time drew near, the Sisters, noticing the change in her person, the swelling in her hands and feet and her increased size, said, "Lady, you seem about to become a mother; what does it mean?"

"I cannot tell, ladies; I only know I have led a virtuous life."

So the Sisters brought her before Devadatta, saying, "Lord, this young gentle-woman, who was admitted a Sister with the reluctant consent of her husband, has now proved to be with child; but whether this dates from before her admission to the Order or not, we cannot say. What are we to do now?"

Not being a Buddha, and not having any charity, love or pity, Devadatta thought thus: "It will be a damaging report to get abroad that one of my Sisters is with child, and that I condone the offence. My course is clear; I must expel this woman from the Order." Without any enquiry, starting forward as if to thrust aside a mass of stone, he said, "Away, and expel this woman!"

Receiving this answer, they arose and with reverent salutation withdrew to their own nunnery. But the girl said to those Sisters, "Ladies, Devadatta the Elder is not the Buddha. My vows were taken not under Devadatta, but under the Buddha, the Foremost of the world. Rob me not of the vocation I won so hardly; but take me before the Master at Jetavana." So they set out with her for Jetavana, and journeying over the forty-five leagues thither from Rajagaha, came in due course to their destination, where with reverent salutation to the Master, they laid the matter before him.

Thought the Master, "Albeit the child was conceived while she was still of the laity, yet it will give the heretics an occasion to say that the ascetic Gotama has taken a Sister expelled by Devadatta. Therefore, to cut short such talk, this case must be heard in the presence of the king and his court." So on the morrow he sent for Pasenadi king of Kosala, the elder and

the younger Anatha-pindika, the lady Visakha the great lay-disciple, and other well-known personages; and in the evening when the four classes of the faithful were all assembled—Brothers, Sisters, and lay-disciples, both male and female—he said to the Elder Upali, “Go, and clear up this matter of the young Sister in the presence of the four classes of my disciples.”

“It shall be done, reverend sir,” said the Elder, and forth to the assembly he went and there, seating himself in his place, he called up Visakha the lay-disciple in sight of the king, and placed the conduct of the enquiry in her hands, saying, “First ascertain the precise day of the precise month on which this girl joined the Order, Visakha; and thence compute whether she conceived before or since that date.” Accordingly the lady had a curtain put up as a screen, behind which she retired with the girl. Spectatis manibus, pedibus, umbilico, ipso ventre puellae, the lady found, on comparing the days and months, that the conception had taken place before the girl had become a Sister. This she reported to the Elder, who proclaimed the Sister innocent before all the assembly. And she, now that her innocence was established, reverently saluted the Order and the Mater, and with the Sisters returned to her own nunnery.

When her time was come, she bore the son strong in spirit, for whom she had prayed at the feet of the Buddha Padumuttara ages ago. One day, when the king was passing by the nunnery, he heard the cry of an infant and asked his courtiers what it meant. They, knowing the facts, told his majesty that the cry came from the child to which the young Sister had given birth. “Sirs,” said the king, “the care of children is a clog on Sisters in their religious life; let us take charge of him.” So the infant was handed over by the king’s command to the ladies of his family, and brought up as a prince. When the day came for him to be named, he was called Kassapa, but was known as Prince Kassapa because he was brought up like a prince.

At the age of seven he was admitted a novice under the Master, and a full Brother when he was old enough. As time went on, he waxed famous among the expounders of the Truth. So the Master gave him precedence, saying, “Brethren, the first in eloquence among my disciples is Prince Kassapa.” Afterwards, by virtue of the Vammika Sutta, he won Arahatship. So too his mother, the Sister, grew to clear vision and won the Supreme Fruit. Prince Kassapa the Elder shone in the faith of the Buddha even as the full-moon in the mid-heaven. Now one day in the afternoon when the Tathagata on return from his alms-round had addressed the Brethren, he passed into his perfumed chamber. At the close of his address the Brethren spent the daytime either in their night-quarters or in their day-quarters till it was evening, when they assembled in the hall of Truth and spoke as follows: “Brethren, Devadatta, because he was not a Buddha and because he had no charity, love or pity, was nigh being the ruin of the Elder Prince Kassapa and his reverend mother. But the All-enlightened Buddha, being the Lord of Truth and being perfect in charity, love and pity, has proved their salvation.” And as they sat there telling the praises of the Buddha, he entered the hall with all the grace of a Buddha, and asked, as he took his. seat, what they were talking of as they sat together.

“Of your own virtues, sir,” said they, and told him all.

“This is not the first time, Brethren,” said he, “that the Tathagata has proved the salvation and refuge of these two: he was the same to them in the past also.”

Then, on the Brethren asking him to explain this to them, he revealed what re-birth had hidden from them.

Once on a time, when Brahmadatta was reigning in Benares, the Bodhisatta was born a deer. At his birth he was golden of hue; his eyes were like round jewels; the sheen of his horns was as of, silver; his mouth was red as a bunch of scarlet cloth; his four hoofs were as though lacquered; his tail was like the yak’s; and he was as big as a young foal. Attended by five hundred deer, he dwelt in the forest under the name of King Banyan Deer. And hard by him dwelt another deer also with an attendant herd of five hundred deer, who was named Branch Deer, and was as golden of hue as the Bodhisatta.

In those days the king of Benares was passionately fond of hunting, and always had meat at every meal. Every day he mustered the whole of his subjects, townsfolk and countryfolk alike, to the detriment of their business, and went hunting. Thought his people, “This king of ours stops all our work. Suppose we were to sow food and supply water for the deer in his own pleasaunce, and, having driven in a number of deer, to bar them in and deliver them over to the king!” So they sowed in the pleasaunce grass for the deer to eat and supplied water for them to drink, and opened the gate wide. Then they called out the townsfolk and set out into the forest armed with sticks and all manner of weapons to find the deer. They surrounded about a league of forest in order to catch the deer within their circle, and in so doing surrounded the haunt of the Banyan and Branch deer. As soon as they perceived the deer, they proceeded to beat the trees, bushes and ground with their sticks till they drove the herds out of their lairs; then they rattled their swords and spears and bows with so great a din that they drove all the deer into the pleasaunce, and shut the gate. Then they went to the king and said, “Sire, you put a stop to our work by always going a-hunting; so we have driven deer enough from the forest to fill your pleasaunce. Henceforth feed on them.”

Hereupon the king betook himself to the pleasaunce, and in looking over the herd saw among them two golden deer, to whom he granted immunity. Sometimes he would go of his own accord and shoot a deer to bring home; sometimes his cook would go and shoot one. At first sight of the bow, the deer would dash off trembling for their lives, but after receiving two or three wounds they grew weary and faint and were slain. The herd of deer told this to the Bodhisatta, who sent for Branch and said, “Friend, the deer are being destroyed in great numbers; and, though they cannot escape death, at least let them not be needlessly wounded. Let the deer go to the block by turns, one day one from my herd, and next day one from yours,—the deer on whom the lot falls to go to the place of execution and lie down with its head on the block. In this wise the deer will escape wounding.” The other agreed; and thenceforth the deer whose turn it was, used to go and lie down with its neck ready on the block. The cook used to go and carry off only the victim which awaited him.

Now one day the lot fell on a pregnant doe of the herd of Branch, and she went to Branch and said, “Lord, I am with young. When I have brought forth my little one, there will be two of us to take our turn. Order me to be passed over this turn.” “No, I cannot make your turn, another’s,” said he; “you must bear the consequences of your own fortune. Begone!” Finding no favour with him, the doe went on to the Bodhisatta and told him her story. And he answered, “Very well; you go away, and I will see that the turn passes over you.” And therewithal he went himself to the place of execution and lay down with his head on the block, Cried the cook on seeing him, “Why here’s the king of the deer who was granted immunity! What does this mean?” And off he ran to tell the king. The moment he heard of it, the king mounted his chariot and arrived with a large following. “My friend the king of the deer,” he said on beholding the Bodhisatta, “did I not promise you your life? How comes it that you are lying here?

“Sire, there came to me a doe big with young, who prayed me to let her turn fall on another; and, as I could not pass the doom of one on to another, I, laying down my life for her and taking her doom on myself, have laid me down here. Think not that there is anything behind this, your majesty.”

“My lord the golden king of the deer,” said the king, “never yet saw I, even among men, one so abounding in charity, love and pity as you. Therefore am I pleased with you. Arise! I spare the lives both of you and of her.”

“Though two be spared, what shall the rest do, O king of men?” “I spare their lives too, my lord.” “Sire, only the deer in your pleasaunce will thus have gained immunity; what shall all the rest do?” “Their lives too I spare, my lord.” “Sire, deer will thus be safe; but what will the rest of four-footed creatures do?” . “I spare their lives too, my lord.” “Sire, four-footed creatures will thus be safe; but what will the flocks of birds do?” “They too shall be spared, my lord.” “Sire, birds will thus be safe; but what will the fishes do, who live in the water?” “I spare their lives also, my lord.”

After thus interceding with the king for the lives of all creatures, the

Great Being arose, established the king in the Five Commandments, saying, “Walk in righteousness, great king. Walk in righteousness and justice towards parents, children, townsmen, and countryfolk, so that when this earthly body is dissolved, you may enter the bliss of heaven.” Thus, with the grace and charm that marks a Buddha, did he teach the Truth to the king. A few days he tarried in the pleasaunce for the king’s instruction, and then with his attendant herd he passed into the forest again.

And that doe brought forth a fawn fair as the opening bud of the lotus, who used to play about with the Branch deer. Seeing this his mother said to him, “My child, don’t go about with him, only go about with the herd of the Banyan deer.” And by way of exhortation, she repeated this stanza:

Keep only with the Banyan deer, and shun

The Branch deer’s herd; more welcome far

Is death, my child, in Banyan’s company,

Than e’en the amplest term of life with Branch.

Thenceforth, the deer, now in the enjoyment of immunity, used to eat men’s crops, and the men, remembering the immunity granted to them, did not dare to hit the deer or drive them away. So they assembled in the king’s courtyard and laid the matter before the king. Said he, “When the Banyan deer won my favour, I promised him a boon. I will forego my kingdom rather than my promise. Begone! Not a man in my kingdom may harm the deer.”

But when this came to the ears of the Banyan deer, he called his herd together and said, “Henceforth you shall not eat the crops of others.” And having thus forbidden them, he sent a message to the men, saying, “From this day forward, let no husbandman fence his field, but merely indicate it with leaves tied up round it.” And so, we hear, began a plan of tying up leaves to indicate the fields; and never was a deer known to trespass on a field so marked. For thus they had been instructed by the Bodhisatta.

Thus did the Bodhisatta exhort the deer of his herd, and thus did he act all his life long, and at the close of a long life passed away with them to fare according to his deserts. The king too abode by the Bodhisatta’s teachings, and after a life spent in good works passed away to fare according to his deserts.

At the close of this lesson, when the Master had repeated that, as now, so in bygone days also he had been the salvation of the pair, he preached the Four Truths. He then shewed the connexion, linking together the two stories he had told, and identified the Birth by saying,—“Devadatta was the Branch Deer of those days, and his followers were that deer’s herd; the nun was the doe, and Prince Kassapa was her offspring; Ananda was the king; and I myself was King Banyan Deer.”

The Jātaka, or Stories of the Buddha’s Former Births, edited by E.B. Cowell, published by The Cambridge University Press.

Vol. 1, translated by Robert Chalmers, 1895.

Vol. 2, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1895.

Vol. 3, translated by H.T. Francis and R.A. Neil, 1897.

Vol. 4, translated by W.H.D. Rouse, 1901.

Vol. 5, translated by H.T. Francis, 1905.

Vol. 6, translated by E.B. Cowell and W.H.D. Rouse, 1907.

These translations are in the public domain. You are free to do whatever you like with them.

Scanned, proofed and formatted at sacred-texts.com, January 2006–February 2010, by John Bruno Hare and others. Thanks to the Sacred Texts Archive for making these texts available in digital form.

Prepared for SuttaCentral by Bhikkhu Sujato.